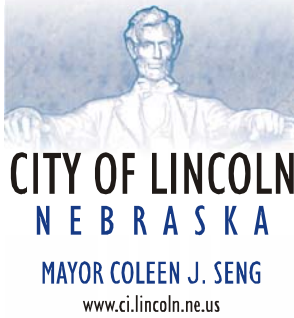


FEES UP/COSTS DOWN

The Lincoln City Council just approved a set of new and increased fees for development applications filed with the Planning Department, along with procedural changes for many of those applications. So how can development costs go down if application fees go up? Because the procedural changes promise to reduce the steps and the timeframes for processing these applications, significantly reducing consultant costs and carrying costs for land developers.



PLANNING DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

- Changes in application fees.** The schedule of fees for zoning and subdivision applications was last reviewed and amended in 1999. The current fees provide only a small portion of the staff time and other costs to process these applications. Planning must coordinate the review of multiple departments and agencies, deal with the applicants/agents and the affected neighbors, research the history and context of the properties in question, draft staff reports, pay for newspaper advertising, compile and send written notification letters, staff reports, attend public meetings, keep minutes of public hearings, and prepare miscellaneous documents. These fees do not begin to recover the staff time and other costs for Public Works, Law, City Clerk, Health and other departments and agencies involved in reviewing these applications. Further, our review of revenues over the past four years also indicated that the 1999 amendments had not achieved the revenue increase that was anticipated at that time to pay for staffing needs.

The new fees were raised by an average of 25 percent from the levels established four years ago. But that should not add more than \$4 to \$5 to the cost of a typical residential lot.

In addition to raising existing fees, the City Council adopted the establishment of some new fees for services. Fees were established to help pay the cost of processing petitions to vacate street and alley rights of way, requests to change street names, requests by applicants to postpone scheduled hearings when that requires re-advertising, and requests to amend the Comprehensive Plan.

- Changes in review procedures.** Preliminary plats for property inside and within three miles of the Lincoln city limits now can be approved by the Planning Commission and need not be scheduled for City Council review unless the applicant or an aggrieved party files an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision. Final plats, which are normally routine because they must conform to the approved preliminary plats, will now be approved administratively by the Planning Director and not require Planning Commission review and approval.

The City Council also amended the procedures in the City Code on "vacating" street and alley right of way -- taking public land that is no longer needed for public use and returning it to the abutting ownerships for private use. In the past, petitions by abutting owners were filed with the City Clerk, sent to Law for review of the property descriptions, then sent to Public Works for technical review, and then sent to Planning, which turned around and sent the application back to these same departments and others for comments, and then took the request through the Planning Commission and City Council hearing process. Exhilarating as this paper chase sounds, we thought it would make more sense for Planning to be the point of initial intake and route applications to all departments to review at the same time, which will shorten processing time.



The Lancaster County Board will consider a similar set of changes to application fees at its September 2nd meeting; however, state statutes currently do not permit the same kinds of procedural changes that were approved in the City codes. If you have any specific questions on the approved or pending changes, e-mail Ray Hill in our office at rhill@ci.lincoln.ne.us or call him at 441-6371.